

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

Mark R. Warner
Governor

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Contact: Ellen Qualls
Phone: (804) 786-2211, x2379
Cell Phone: (804) 393-9429
Internet: www.governor.state.va.us

GOVERNOR WARNER ANNOUNCES MENTAL HEALTH CARE REFORMS
~Reform Agenda for 2003 shifts resources to community-based care~

RICHMOND - Governor Mark R. Warner will propose a major shift in policy toward community mental health care to improve care for patients, build community services, and position Virginia as a national leader in moving patients from state institutions back into their communities.

The Governor's proposal, entitled the "Community Reinvestment Project," will redirect nearly \$22 million annually from state mental health institutions to community services boards. The community services boards will use these reinvested funds to offer innovative community care to patients who would otherwise be institutionalized.

"Community-based care acknowledges the dignity of every individual and their right to live as full members of society," said Governor Warner. "We are making this change because I am committed to making sure that Virginians with disabilities not only have the same rights as everyone else, but the same opportunities as well. In short, this is the right thing to do and it's the right time to do it."

The Governor's reforms will:

Redirect resources from mental health institutions to fund innovative community care. The Governor's budget on December 20 will allow reinvestment of up to \$21.7 million annually from five state mental health institutions to innovative community care through community services boards.

Deliver better care to mentally ill persons through innovative community care. This reform proposal will redirect resources from state institutions to fund innovative community care through the state's 40 community services boards. Examples include: establishing a regional behavioral health authority to manage a community program in a vacant hospital building at Central State Hospital and creating regional jail service teams to provide assessment and limited counseling services.

Close units and beds at state mental health facilities. Inpatient beds at five institutions will be reduced: Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute in Falls Church, Southwest Virginia Mental Health Institute in Marion, and Western State Hospital in Staunton. However, no institutions will be closed as a result of this proposal.

Encourage community services to be operated on the campus of existing mental health institutions. The Governor's reform package will take advantage of existing space and existing employees at state mental health facilities to help operate community care projects, when appropriate, directly on the campuses of state mental health institutions.

Work closely with local communities and interested parties. The Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse has worked closely with community services boards in developing the

Community Reinvestment Project. The department, building on House Bill 995 approved by the 2002 General Assembly, will continue working closely with consumers, advocates, private providers, local governments and others as its mental health restructuring efforts proceed.

Develop an infrastructure for community care without added cost. In difficult budget times, the Governor has found an innovative way to invest substantial resources (\$21.7 million) for developing the kind of community infrastructure that will serve patients better, all while remaining budget neutral. Savings from mental health facilities in a given area are reinvested in the community services boards serving the area. No money is diverted from service delivery.

Put a priority on placing state employees affected by the downsizing of mental health institutions. Every effort will be made to generate savings through elimination of vacancies, rather than layoffs. The state will also work in partnership with community services boards to use current state employees to staff the innovative community services developed as a result of this proposal.

Take a major step forward in complying with the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that mentally ill individuals have a constitutional right to community care in many circumstances. The Governor's proposal is a major step forward in the ongoing effort to meet Virginia's obligations under the Olmstead decision.

"This initiative came from the bottom up, not from Richmond," said Howard Cullum, CSB Director, former Commissioner of Mental Health, and former Secretary of Health and Human Resources. "It puts patients in the most appropriate care setting and moves us a long way forward on our shared goal of strengthening community mental health care."

"This has the most systematic, most inclusive effort since we started talking about community care in 1968 to move people and services into the community, while safeguarding local economies and state employees," said Mary Ann Bergeron, Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards. "The department's community orientation is palpable, and it's very much appreciated by those of us working to deliver community mental health care."

"I applaud Governor Warner for recognizing the need to build a community-based infrastructure to provide services to those suffering from mental health illnesses, mental retardation, and/or substance abuse addictions," said Delegate Phil Hamilton, Chairman of the House Committee on Health, Welfare, and Institutions. "Hopefully, this will be the first of many funding initiatives to address the historically woeful under-funding of services for these vulnerable Virginia citizens."

"In my 25 plus years of working on these issues, this is the biggest step forward any Governor has ever taken," said Delegate Frank Hall, House Minority Leader and mental health services advocate.

Governor Warner's proposals to reform the way the Commonwealth delivers mental health services are part of a broader package of reforms he will propose to the General Assembly in January. In addition, the Governor will call for: additional tools for enforcement of traffic safety; an end to one-term limit for Virginia governors beginning in 2009; reforms to the financial management of VDOT; sweeping changes in the way that Virginia develops budgets and manages state finances; the consolidation of several existing agencies, including information technology; reforms in the delivery of certain human services; the establishment of a comprehensive state water policy; and a reform in service delivery to Virginia's veterans.

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